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STANFIELD HALL.

By J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.

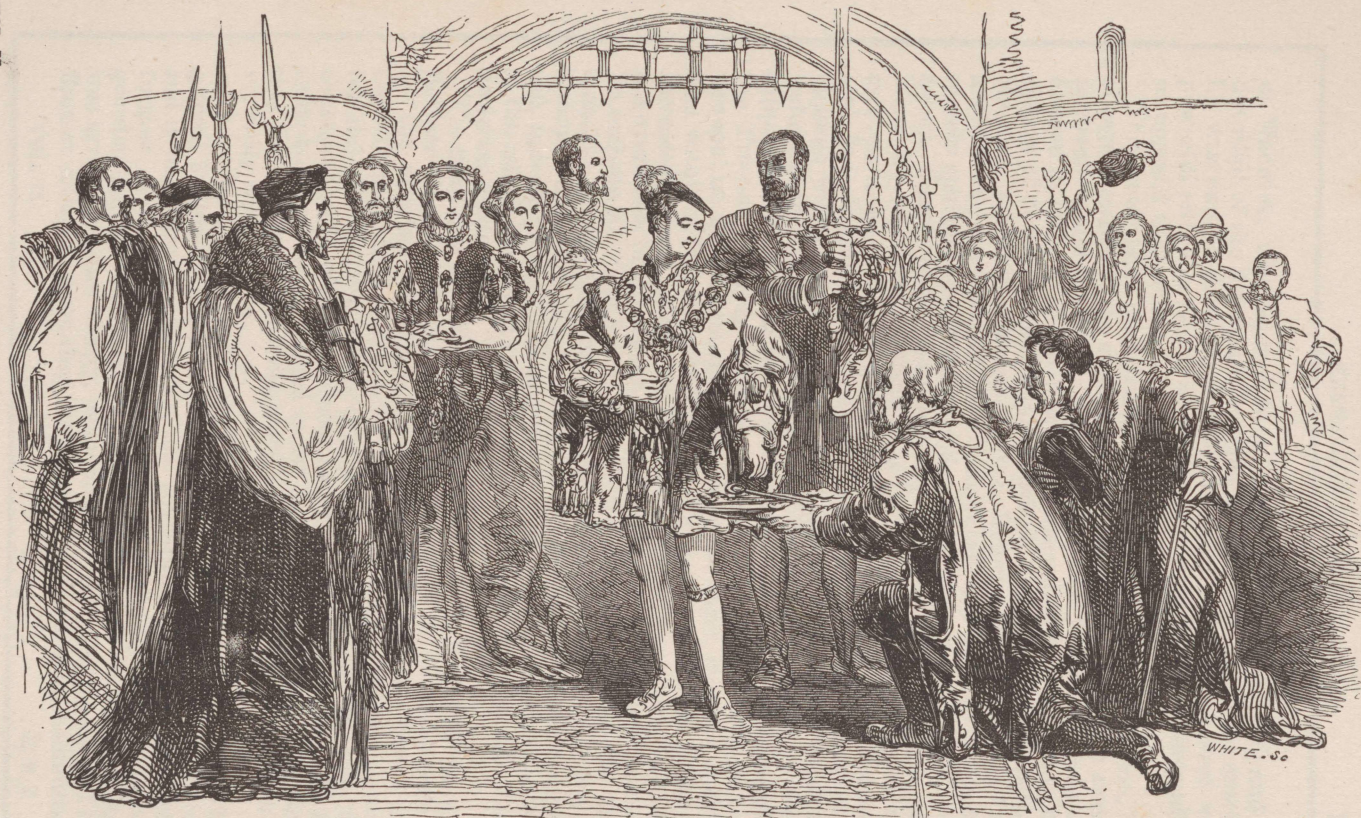


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[RECEPTION OF EDWARD VI. AT THE TOWER.]

STANFIELD HALL.

369

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of Warwick, who aspired in secret to the Protectorship and the downfall of the Seymours, leagued himself with him: he saw that he was one of those men who in times like the present were powerful either in favour or against any cause to which they allied or opposed themselves.

The Protector, in his schemes for advancing the Reformation, had always recourse to the counsels of Cranmer, who, being a man of moderation and prudence, was averse to all violent changes, and desired to bring over the people by insensible innovations to that system of doctrine and discipline which he deemed most perfect. He also, probably, foresaw that a Reformation which carefully avoided extremes was likely to be most lasting; and that a devotion merely spiritual was fitted only to the fervour of a new sect. He seems, therefore, to have contemplated the establishment of a hierarchy which might stand as a perpetual barrier against Rome, and retain the reverence of the people, even after their enthusiastic zeal had diminished or entirely evaporated. The person who opposed with greatest authority any further advances towards the Reformation was Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, who was secretly supported by Warwick in the council as a means of embarrassing the Protector, whose younger brother, Lord Seymour, had so wrought on the affections of the queen dowager, that she married him within a few months of Henry's death—a union which so increased his wealth and credit, that he aimed at nothing less than the overthrow of the regent, and seizing the reins of power himself. To increase his popularity, he affected the opinions of the most fanatical of the Reformers—spoke of reducing the number of bishops—lessening the power of the convocation of the clergy—and, indeed, gave it to be secretly understood that he was opposed to the establishment of any hierarchy, as savouring too much of the doctrines of Rome.

The great aim of Somerset's policy was to carry out the plan of the late king, and secure the union between England and Scotland by the marriage of Edward with the infant queen; but as the Catholic party in the latter country was still dominant, all overtures for the alliance were courteously refused, and a war was the consequence, in which the Scots, as usual, were worsted; but the advantages not being pushed to the last extremity, it only inspired that impetuous people with a still greater aversion to a union so violently courted.

The queen dowager of Scotland, finding that such was the general feeling of the nation, called a Parliament at Haddington, and it was there proposed that the youthful Mary should, for still further security, be sent to France, and committed to the guardianship of that ancient ally; which, after a stormy debate, was agreed to—the clergy, who dreaded the consequence of the English alliance, seconding the measure with all their influence.

It was while the Protector was engaged in the war to which these circumstances gave rise, that Lord Seymour sought the occasion of his overthrow, and made an attempt which ultimately recoiled upon himself.

He represented to his friends that formerly, during a minority, the office of Protector of the kingdom had ever been kept distinct from that of governor of the king's person, and that the union of these important officers in one person conferred an authority dangerous to the well-being of the kingdom. He even procured a letter from the young king, addressed to the Parliament, in which Edward desired that Seymour might be appointed his governor. The design, however, was discovered, and a party of nobles sent to remonstrate with him. He received them haughtily, and threatened, if his just claims were rejected, to make the Parliament the blackest which ever sat in England. Alarmed at his proceedings, the council summoned him before them to answer for his conduct. He refused to attend; upon which they threatened to order him to the Tower; at the same time stating that, so far from the young king's letter being a protection, it would be considered as an aggravation of his offence. This firmness, added to the loss of influence which he experienced on the death of his wife, the queen dowager, who expired in childbed, induced him to submit to his brother, and a hollow reconciliation was patched up between them.

Once more a widower, Seymour now turned his ambitious views towards the Throne itself. He saw that Edward's constitution was weak, that in all probability he would not live long; he therefore secretly made his addresses to the Princess Elizabeth, then in the sixteenth year of her age; and that lady, whom even the pursuit of ambition and the hurry of political intrigue could not, in her more advanced years, entirely disengage from the influence of the tender passion, seems to have listened to his overtures with considerable complacency. But as Henry, by his will, had excluded his daughters from all share in the succession, unless they married with the consent of his executors, and that consent it was certain Seymour never could obtain, it was concluded that he meant to effect his purpose by expedients even more rash and criminal. Secretly as these proceedings had been carried on, they reached the ears of the council, and several secret meetings had been held to consider whether the moment had not arrived to arrest the daring conspirator. Warwick, to the astonishment of all, was against such a proceeding, his secret aim being to involve the Lady Elizabeth in Seymour's downfall, and so remove one barrier to him and the long-cherished object of his ambition.

It is not to be supposed that on his return to England our old acquaintance Walter suffered much time to elapse before he petitioned for the raising of the sequestration which Henry in his wrath had laid upon the lands of Stanfield. Day after day he

attended the council, and was as frequently put off with promises never intended to be kept, for the spoil was too rich to be lightly disgorged. It was on one of these occasions, while waiting in the ante-chamber with his friend and adviser Patch, that he heard voices in loud and stormy debate within.

This was the more unusual, as Edward himself presided at the council board.

"One would imagine," said the jester, in his usual sarcastic tone, "that the king amused himself at shovel-board, instead of presiding at a council-board. Didst hear that voice?"

"'Twas Warwick's," observed his companion; "his fortune swells him."

"And will," added Patch, "until the bubble bursts. When the oak hath fallen, the reed imagines itself an oak. There are shades which haunt these walls must smile in bitter mockery at the fantastic tricks of their successors—pigmies playing at the Titans' games."

"The dispute grows warmer."

"Would'st like to see the interior of the ant-hill?" demanded Patch.

"What mean you?"

"Follow me," continued his friend; "the Syracusan tyrant was not the only one who framed an ear to test his courtiers' truth. There are secrets in this palace would make Satan smile with admiration, were he planning one for his own home."

"Mean you——"

"Follow me, and see."

Hastily passing from the ante-chamber, they entered the armoury, where goodly suits were piled in niches, some inlaid with gold, others curiously damascened in Milan steel; and at the east end of the room, in a recess, was a magnificent one, both for man and horse, worn by the late king, and presented to him by his sometime ally and friend, and sometime enemy, the Emperor Charles V. The species of arch under which it stood was panelled in oak, to correspond with the rest of the apartment. After carefully looking round to see that they were not observed, the jester pushed back an acorn in the centre of one of the mouldings, when a portion of the wainscot, large enough to admit of a stout person passing, rolled back, and discovered a passage, dimly lit by loop-holes, irregularly left in the deeply-moulded cornice, which ran round the alcove. Obeying a motion of his hand, Walter followed his conductor, who, despite the obscurity, walked like one certain of his whereabouts, till they reached a small closet, in which were two chairs covered with rich brocade, but enveloped in dust from long disuse. They were both placed close to the wall, in which apertures were pierced, extending to the back of the throne, and through which the voice of the speakers at the council-board were

conveyed as by so many speaking trumpets to the inmates of the room.

"An ingenious contrivance," observed Walter, as he gazed curiously around.

"What is more ingenious than tyranny?" demanded his companion.

"Was this the late king's contrivance?"

"No, his father's," replied the jester, "the man with a kingly crown and a scrivener's heart; whose wisdom was to suspect all and trust to no man—who loved gold better than Heaven, and who only left his hoards behind because he could hit on no means of taking them with him—whose life was one incarnate lie—who murdered the heir he pretended to avenge, and blackened Richard's memory to justify his own."

"You speak of the impostor Perkin Warbeck?" said Walter.

"Impostor!" repeated Patch, his lip quivering with suppressed emotion as he echoed the word.

"At least I have been taught to consider him as such."

"Then think so still," exclaimed his friend; "'tis not the first lie honest men have trusted. It were a curious speculation, Walter," he added kindly, "to calculate how many truths and errors time will one day set in their true light—how many fames purge of the damning spots which miscalled history has splashed them o'er with—how many earthly glories it will dim."

"True."

"To time, then, leave Perkin Warbeck and his cause," said the jester: "the old destroyer will prove his best avenger. Hark!" he added, as the sound of voices rose high within the council chamber, "that is Warwick speaking."

"Warwick!" repeated Walter, puzzled at the new title, although he recognised the voice.

"Or Dudley," added Patch, "an thou likest the popinjay by his old plumage better. Hast thou forgot the chase he led thee the night we fled from Kimbolton with the Princess Mary? He plays a daring game; but, if I read the royal orphan's star aright, a losing one. Both Somerset and Seymour are his tools. He plays the brothers each against the other, striving to ruin both."

"He is a traitor!" muttered Walter.

"You mistake," said his friend; "he is a politician."

On applying their ears to the apertures, they heard Warwick propose that a warrant should be made out for Seymour's committal to the Tower, to be used only in the event of his completing his projected marriage with the Princess Elizabeth, whose want of duty and respect to her brother and sovereign Edward, in listening to such clandestine proposals, he painted in language but too well calculated to excite the young prince's resentment.

"Why not proceed at once?" demanded Somerset, who was seated

upon a stool placed on the throne itself, beside his nephew ; " I cannot see the motive for this delay."

" Nor I," modestly added the youthful prince.

" These are the things the world calls statesmen," muttered the jester ; " the motive is as clear as any sunbeam ; aught save a bat or barn owl might see through it."

" Were it not wiser," continued Warwick—he prudently put the suggestion interrogatively, in order to feel his ground as he went along—" to let the princess still further commit herself, even to the consenting to a private marriage with this ambitious man ? and by that act forfeit all chance of succession to the crown ? "

" And then ? " said Cranmer, inquiringly.

" Arrest them both together : Seymour will be ta'en in the overt act of treason, Elizabeth in rebellion to her brother's will."

All the members of the council present, except Cranmer, whose affection for his god-daughter induced him to oppose it, voted in favour of the proposition of the earl, to whom the warrant, signed by the king and Somerset's own hands, was accordingly intrusted, to be put in force the moment he should find the act of treason accomplished ; indeed, so excited were both the Protector and the youthful Edward, that it required all the primate's eloquence to prevent the name of the imprudent princess from being included in the order of arrest ; as it was, he only postponed it.

" We have witnessed a strange scene," observed Walter, in a whisper to his companion ; " what can be Warwick's motive ? "

" Ambition," replied Patch ; " he plays one brother off against the other."

" But his hostility to the Lady Elizabeth ? "

" She stands between him and the crown."

" The crown ! " repeated Walter, with a look of astonishment.

" Not for himself," added the jester,—that were a flight too lofty e'en for his ambition,—but for another, under whose name he trusts to reign, and through whose marriage he will place his own blood on England's throne. I have watched his game **with** interest ; he plays it boldly, but will fail at last."

" You think so ? "

" I am sure so," replied Patch ; " the devil, whom he serves, will place his foot upon the throne, then change it to a scaffold. It is not often I predict in vain."

" The princess must be warned in time," exclaimed Walter, after a few moments' pause.

" The daughter of Anne Boleyn," said the jester, fixing his eye upon the speaker.

" Is not answerable for her mother's cruelty," replied our hero ; " besides, she is an orphan and a woman, beset by enemies, waylaid with cruel snares. Trust me, old friend, we shall sleep better for the rescuing her."

His companion pressed his hand with the air of a man who felt that he had wronged him by a doubt, which he never ought to have entertained, of his generosity and justice.

"The serpent's trail," he whispered, "despite man's fall, hath not left its venom in every heart—earth were indeed a desert else."

The discussion before the council on the fate of Seymour was followed by one of still greater importance to our hero—the consideration of his petition for the restoration of his wife's estates. Patch, through the agency of his partner Mariette, had solicited the influence of several of the members of the board, who being under great pecuniary obligations to the wealthy merchant, had faithfully promised their best services when the question came before them. It was amusing to witness how they kept their faith; not one who had pledged himself but spoke and argued against the impolicy of restoring the rich domain of Stanfield to its owner; the great plea urged was, that if the business of restoration was once commenced, there was no knowing where the claims might stop, and that the crown would become impoverished by such acts of justice. Warwick, who had an eye to the possession for himself, was particularly opposed to it; it was not the only project in which he was doomed to disappointment.

"Farewell to Stanfield!" exclaimed Walter, bitterly, as he listened to the discussion. "Justice, Justice, how is thy name perverted!"

"Fear not," said Patch; "the heir shall win it yet."

His friend shook his head incredulously.

"I tell thee so," continued the speaker; "nay, more, I promise thee—and experience hath by this time convinced thee that the jester's promise is more to be relied on than a prince's oath. But come," he added, "let us retrace our steps; we have heard all that concerns us, more than we came to hear. Home—home—and there consider the best means to baffle Warwick and preserve Elizabeth."

"And Seymour," added his companion, with earnestness.

"Is past hope," added the jester; "one of those stubborn men who think fate may be vanquished by braving it—who try to stare danger out of countenance, nor find their error till they fall o'er the precipice."

That very night two horsemen, dressed as Italian merchants, each carrying a small bale of merchandise, set out for Hatfield, the residence of the Princess Elizabeth, who, although regarded with more favour by her Protestant brother than the Catholic Princess Mary, was still, from her proximity to the crown, an object of suspicion; and from the attachment which the great body of Reformers bore her person—almost of rivalry—Seymour was not far wrong in his calculation when he thought that the possession

of her hand would prove a stepping-stone to the realisation of his dreams of ambition.

It is impossible to ascertain at this remote period how far the courtship was really carried between Seymour and the youthful princess ; but there is every reason to believe that she was fascinated with the elegant manners and eloquent tongue of her suitor, and, but for the interference of the council, would have married him, despite the clause in her father's will, which, as Edward was then in health and Mary stood between her and the succession, affected her but little. It would have been a singular marriage, that of the brother of Jane Seymour and the daughter of Anne Boleyn !

Elizabeth was walking in the grounds of Hatfield, attended by the ladies of her little Court, who in point of fact were no other than spies upon her conduct, placed there by the jealous Somerset and intriguing Warwick to watch her, when two traders, having all the appearance of Italian merchants, were seen making their way towards the house.

The heart of the princess was ill at ease. With her usual penetration—for she was remarkable for that quality even at that early age—she saw that she was surrounded by those who, under the mask of respect, were little better than enemies, ready to catch at each unguarded word. She had promised that very evening to meet her lover—to listen to his vows, if not to yield to his importunate entreaties for a secret marriage, which something whispered her would be the signal of his ruin, if not her own. Time hung, as it always does in moments of anxiety, with leaden pinions, and despite her habit of self-command, a close observer might have seen by her restless eye that her heart was ill at ease.

No sooner did the horsemen perceive the princess than they dismounted from their steeds, which they consigned to two stout serving men who followed them. They approached the group of ladies.

"Back, fellows !" said Lady Mortimer, who acted as mistress of the little household at Hatfield, where, at this period, Elizabeth was only a temporary visitor ; "no strangers are permitted to approach her grace."

The intruders instantly paused, not to alarm the party, and respectfully uncovered to the future queen, who gently inclined her head, at the same time demanding of the speaker who the strangers were.

"Traders, I believe," replied her ladyship.

"From Milan, your grace," added the elder of the strangers, who was, in fact, no other than Patch. "I have passementeries might serve an empress for her coronation robes, and taffety fit to line them, jewel work from Florence, a ring from Cellini's own hand, and a pearl which her highness Louise of Savoy sent to the Constable Bourbon when she offered him her hand in marriage, as

a means of settling their disputes ; laces of Venice," he added, "and cunning work from Flanders—merchandise worthy of beauty's eyes to dwell upon."

Walter, whose experience in the nature of the baubles they carried was less than his companion's, was occupied during this speech in unbuckling the straps of the packs, and displaying their contents to view. Elizabeth, not suspecting that the traders were other than they seemed, was turning coldly away, when the entreaties of her attendants arrested her steps, and she suffered herself to be persuaded to examine the strangers' merchandise, much of which was really curious and valuable.

Never had the fair dames found so reasonable a trader. The Venetian laces and passementeries changed owners at a price far short of the value of the precious metals in which they were worked. A small mirror of smoked crystal attracted the attention of Lady Mortimer, whom female curiosity had thrown off her guard.

"And what is this, Sir Italian ?" she demanded.

"An Egyptian mirror," replied the jester, "in which the past may be recalled and the future predicted. It was a similar one in which Cleopatra foresaw the choice between death and the dishonour of a Roman triumph, and chose the latter. The wise Cornelius, in this very one, showed the late Earl of Surrey his lady-love ; and in this—provided," he added, "that your ladyship is still unmarried—you may see the features of your future husband."

"Thou knowest I am a widow, cunning knave," replied the dame, laughingly ; "to me thy glass is useless."

"In that case others may read your fortunes for you," observed Patch.

Lady Mortimer, like most of the females of the age, was superstitious, and although she professed the while her utter disbelief in the virtues of the glass, she suffered herself to be persuaded to step aside with the merchant to consult it. As soon as they were out of hearing of the circle, the jester asked her upon what point she wished to consult his skill.

"A promise hath been made me," said the lady, in a low tone, fearful lest even the trees should hear her ; "canst tell by whom ?"

Patch looked for several moments in the glass.

"A tall, dark man," he replied, "who has a scar on his right temple ; a soldier, I should judge from his martial air ; a noble certain, for he wears the chain and badge of some knightly order, and a bear's head upon the pommel of his sword. Have I described him rightly, lady ?"

"As faithfully as I could myself," replied the awe-stricken woman.

It was no great wonder that he did so, for he had long been

acquainted with the Earl of Warwick, and knew that Lady Mortimer was in his interests.

"Will he keep faith with me?" she demanded.

Again the mirror was consulted, with the same apparent confidence, by the stranger.

"No," he boldly answered.

"No!" repeated the lady.

"He himself will not possess the power. I see him crushed by a pile he has been endeavouring to rear; a scaffold—an axe—and woe," he added, "woe to those who trust him."

From his knowledge of mankind and peculiar means of information, it required no very profound knowledge in the black art for the speaker to predict the downfall of the ambitious Warwick. His listener was both surprised and intimidated at his skill, and received his predictions with superstitious reverence.

"What," said the princess, advancing towards them, for she had observed the changing countenance of Lady Mortimer, "hath the cunning man told thee of a second husband, or predicted that thy first one should return?"

"Neither," replied the lady, drawing a little on one side, that Elizabeth might consult the oracle, if such were her pleasure.

The princess eyed our old acquaintance for some time with a cool, steady glance, as if she were mentally reading him.

"Thou art a clever knave," she at last exclaimed, "to have wrought this on the Lady Mortimer! But come," she added, good-humouredly, "let me try thy skill. Tell me, what has fate in reserve for me?"

"A crown," replied Patch, without a moment's hesitation.

"Speak lower," said the princess, who began to feel alarmed at her imprudence, well knowing that such a prediction might materially injure her both with Edward and her sister Mary, should any of the spies around her overhear it. "When?" she added.

"After trials which will wear your patience, and dangers which it will require all your prudence to avoid," whispered the jester.

"From whence arises my chief danger?" anxiously inquired the princess.

"Love."

The questioner started—it seemed as if a warning was thus singularly conveyed to her of the precipice upon the brink of which she so incautiously was treading.

"Keep not your rendezvous to-night," continued the speaker, "nor write the promise which ambition, and not love, demands. Evil eyes are upon you, lady—evil hands ready to work you ill. The warrant is already signed for Seymour's arrest."

"His arrest?" faltered Elizabeth.

"You cannot save him, but may share his ruin. Farewell, lady,"

added the speaker ; "my task is ended. Be faithful to yourself, and let not a moment's weakness mar your fortunes."

The rest of the ladies were so astonished at the effect produced both upon the princess and Lady Mortimer, that they feared to make a trial of the merchant's skill, but suffered both him and his companion to depart without further question. As soon as they were gone, Elizabeth, under plea of indisposition, retired to Hatfield House, where she immediately secluded herself from the observation of her household to reflect upon the warning she had received.

In the delightful grounds which surrounded the mansion stood a species of labyrinth or grotto, adorned with shells and minerals wrought into quaint devices. At the further end a fountain gave an artificial coolness during the heat of summer to the recess, in which Seymour and the thoughtless object of his passion were accustomed to meet. In this grotto a pursuivant-at-arms and a dozen halberdiers had been for several hours concealed, when a horseman, gallantly mounted, drew rein near the mouth of their retreat. They had received their orders, and it seems their instructions were not to secure the intruder alone. Warwick's plan was to arrest the lovers at the very moment of their meeting. The night, fortunately for their intentions, was a dark one, and suited to their purpose.

"Curse on this delay !" exclaimed the impatient Seymour, after he had paced for upwards of an hour the moss-covered floor of the place of rendezvous. "What can have detained her? Were she once mine," he thought, "I would throw off the mask, and brave my serpent brother. Wedded to Elizabeth, the Reformers would unhesitatingly throw themselves into my hands; and so supported, what might I not achieve? The Protectorship—the crown itself," he slowly added; "for there are those who think with me that Edward's life is worth but little purchase, and Mary's title bad by her mother's most unholy marriage. Would she were here !"

Scarcely had the aspiring lover—if lover he might be called whose love was but a stepping-stone to his ambition—finished his reflections, than a figure, dressed in white, and covered with a thickly embroidered veil, was seen cautiously to approach the grotto. Seymour no sooner beheld her than he exclaimed "Elizabeth !" and instantly enfolded her in his embrace. Before one word of warning or reproof could be uttered, the concealed halberdiers, headed by the pursuivant, burst from their concealment, and the latter, laying his hand upon the shoulder of the noble, in the king's name arrested him. Knowing the fiery temper of the man they had to deal with, the captors prudently disarmed him before he recovered from his surprise; and throwing a cloak over his head, to drown his cries, should he attempt to call assist-

ance, they hurried him to a litter which they had left concealed within the grove, and quietly left the domain of Hatfield for the high road, where a troop of horse was waiting to escort them back to London.

"Princess," said the pursuivant, bending the knee before the veiled figure, "pardon me the office it is my duty to perform. You are a prisoner."

"I am no princess," replied the lady, haughtily, attempting at the same time to pass him.

"My orders," resumed the officer, intercepting her passage, "are to arrest any lady whom I may find in company with the Lord Seymour. Will it please you follow me?"

"This is some error!" exclaimed the female, in a supplicating voice; "indeed it is an error! Let me return to the house and I will reward you amply. You will repent this," she added.

"Lady," said the officer, more than ever convinced of the high rank of the speaker, "I am faithful. The order for your arrest is sealed with the king's own seal, signed by his hand. Think you without due warrant I had ventured to this extremity? Force me not, I beseech your grace, to use measures unworthy of your dignity."

On a signal given by the speaker, a second litter was brought from the wood, into which the reluctant lady was compelled to enter, and the whole party started on their return, the pursuivant fully satisfied that he had succeeded in the object of his mission and captured both the lovers, an achievement for which he well knew both the Protector and Warwick would liberally reward him.

The following day he arrived with his prisoners at the Tower. Seymour was instantly conveyed to the prison in the governor's keep, and the second litter, with great mystery and respect, to the royal lodgings.

It was whispered, as it passed, that it contained the Princess Elizabeth.

"Poor thing!" exclaimed an old warder, when he heard it; "I can well remember the arrival of her mother."

About noon on the following day, Cheapside was thrown into confusion by the arrival of the king, who, attended by the Duke of Somerset, Warwick, Cranmer, and the rest of the lords of the council, was on his way to the Tower. Edward at this time was in his fifteenth year, tall, and remarkably graceful for his years, and highly popular with the citizens both on account of his youth and the comparative mildness of his government, so different from the iron rule of his father. The young king bitterly regretted the step into which he had been betrayed by ordering the arrest of his sister, and he evinced a determination to investigate the charges against her himself—so unusual, that both Warwick and the Pro-

tector had cause for reflection. The lion's cub began to show that in time it would be a lion too.

The monarch bowed gracefully to the acclamations of his subjects as he passed along, and with a gallantry worthy of the descendant of Edward the Fourth, doffed his plumed cap to the fair ladies in the balconies, whence loving eyes darted their light upon him, and gentle lips spoke blessings as he went.

On his arrival at the Tower, Sir William Kingston presented the keys of the fortress on a golden salver ; the prince merely touched them, in token of his sovereignty, then smilingly returned them, observing, as he did so, that they could not be in more faithful hands.

The proud Duke of Somerset was so thrown into the shade by the royal bearing of his nephew, that he experienced a pang of jealousy at the change, and instead of yielding to the assumption of the monarch gracefully, he vented his spleen during the day by endeavouring at every step to thwart him ; a proceeding as impolitic as it was useless.

"Our uncle seems in no very gracious humour," whispered the king to Cranmer, as, leaning on his arm, he entered the council chamber, where Seymour had been already brought.

Edward had come with the express intention of acting favourably towards the unhappy man, whose violence, unfortunately for himself, and fortunately for his enemies, broke forth at the very first question put to him by the primate. On this his nephew at once ordered him to be conveyed to his prison, and from henceforth took little, if any, interest in his fate.

"We have another prisoner to question here," observed Warwick, as soon as Seymour had been removed ; "the Princess Elizabeth."

"Say rather an explanation to hear," interrupted Edward, gravely ; for Elizabeth had ever been the favourite of his sisters.

"Here is the warrant for her apprehension," said Somerset, pointing at the same time to the parchment bearing his own and nephew's signature lying on the council table. The monarch motioned to the primate to pass it to him. He read it carefully as soon as he received it, and retained it in his hand.

"A chair of state," he exclaimed to the governor of the Tower, "for our sister."

The supposed princess was introduced, still wearing her veil. The council rose upon her entrance, and the king himself motioned her to the seat which had been placed for her.

"This is not the Princess Elizabeth," exclaimed the Earl of Warwick, who had been scanning her figure narrowly ; "there is some mistake here."

"I told them so," said the lady ; "but no one would believe me."

She threw aside her veil as she spoke, and discovered the features of Lady Mortimer.

"What means this mummary?" coarsely demanded Somerset. "Answer to me, or——"

"Answer to me," mildly interrupted Edward. "Rise, Lady Mortimer. Our uncle is a soldier, and his manners savour somewhat too rudely of the camp. Explain this mystery."

"I was sent with this letter by my royal mistress."

"Where?"

"To the grotto at Hatfield, sire."

"Whom to give it to?"

"The Lord Seymour."

"I see it all, sire," blandly exclaimed Warwick; "this lady has been mistaken for her grace. There still is time to execute the warrant."

"Had we not better read the letter first?"

The letter, which was in the handwriting of Elizabeth, was handed by Edward to the primate, who, hastily breaking the seal, read aloud to the astonished council as follows:—

"MY LORD,—I thank you in all honesty for your good opinion of me, which is doubtless flattering to one of my inexperience and years. I neither accept nor decline it, referring myself in all things touching the disposition of my unworthy hand to the pleasure of my dear brother and sovereign lord, your master as well as mine. Unless you come armed with his authority, my lord, to Hatfield, come no more.

"ELIZABETH."

"A prudent and a wise reply," added Cranmer, as he passed the letter to the members of the council.

"A juggling one," exclaimed Somerset, impatient that the princess had eluded his snare; "but it is not too late. Let a troop of horsemen, with Sir William Kingston, start this very hour for Hatfield. We have other evidence, and——"

"Let them not stir," said Edward, rising and tearing the warrant into several pieces; "our sister is absolved in our judgment."

"But not in mine," interrupted the imprudent duke.

Edward eyed him for a few moments with an air of cold surprise; and, for the first time perhaps, the idea struck him that he should like to throw off the tutelage of *both his uncles*. Warwick watched the glance, and was not slow to profit by it.

"We have heard the expression of his highness's pleasure," he exclaimed; "my lords, the council, I presume, is ended."

Then did the first doubt of Warwick enter the mind of the Protector.

CHAPTER XXV.

This is no natural sleep ; some cruel hand
Hath nipp'd the bud ere it became a flower ;
Stifled the goodly promises of youth
E'en in their sweet unfoldings.

THE Protector having called a Session of Parliament, it was resolved to proceed against Lord Seymour by bill of attainder ; and the young king, whom his uncle's violence and imprudence had disgusted, was, without much difficulty, induced to give his assent to the proceeding, an approbation upon which the peers laid much weight. The matter was first brought before the Upper House, and several nobles rose in their places, and gave an account of what they knew concerning the intentions of the accused ; his criminal projects, words, and actions. These narratives, framed, for the most part, on violated confidences or vague suspicions, were, through the influence of Warwick, received as so much legal evidence ; and, although the prisoner had formerly many partisans and friends in that august assembly, not one of them had the courage or honesty to move that he should be heard in his defence, or that he should be confronted with the witnesses. A little more scruple was made in the House of Commons, where all our battles for the civil rights of England were ultimately fought. There were even some members who objected against the whole method of proceeding by bill of attainder, and insisted that a formal trial should be given to every man before his condemnation. Soon after, on the 20th of March, the following month, a message was sent by the king, commanding the House to proceed upon the same evidence as the House of Peers. The Commons were induced to acquiesce. The Bill passed in a full House with not more than ten dissentient voices.

The sentence was afterwards executed upon Tower Hill, and the warrant signed by the criminal's own brother, Somerset, who was universally execrated for the unnatural proceeding.

The state of England at this time was anything but peaceful. Murmurs and complaints were common among the people. The general increase also of gold and silver in Europe, after the discoveries of Columbus and his companions, had a tendency to influence these complaints. The growing demand in more commercial countries had heightened everywhere the price of commodities which could rarely be transported thither. But in England the labour of men who could not so easily change their markets remained at the ancient rates, and the poor complained bitterly that they could no longer obtain a subsistence by their industry. The Protector, who loved popularity and pitied the condition of the people, encouraged these complaints by the very

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